

COMMON DONOR GREENING PRIORITY ACTIONS

PRIORITY ACTION 3



Implement measures to significantly minimise greenhouse gas emissions from travel and transport.

February 2026

Moving humanitarian personnel and assistance is an essential part of ensuring that affected communities receive the life-saving assistance they require. Efforts to reduce the climate and environmental impact of how humanitarian actors travel and transport goods (both locally and internationally) should never come at the expense of the quality and quantity of this assistance. However, changes to optimise and increase the efficiency of travel and transport can improve environmental outcomes whilst also reducing costs¹ - savings that can, in turn, be reinvested into projects and programmes. Humanitarian organisations exercise direct control over their travel and transport policies, making this an area where change can be implemented relatively easily. As a result, this priority action represents a clear “low-hanging fruit” for the sector.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff Travel

- ✓ Limit national and international air travel to *essential* trips,² for example those that are time-critical for humanitarian delivery, cannot be effectively carried out remotely or by local staff or are necessary to avoid negative impacts on life-saving activities.
- ✓ Switch from business and first-class flights to economy class only (emissions per passenger are estimated to be, respectively, 3 and 6 times higher in these classes than in economy³).
- ✓ Promote online participation in meetings and events rather than in-person attendance where this would require international or long-distance travel.
- ✓ Prioritise train travel and direct flights, whenever possible.
- ✓ Plan longer missions and combine trips to reduce back-and-forth travel.
- ✓ Leverage and build local and regional expertise through capacity building measures, rather than relying on international experts that need to be flown in.

Fleet

¹ Climate Action Accelerator estimates that reducing emissions related to travel can help achieve savings up to 0,4 % of an organisation’s annual budget (Operational Playbook for Humanitarian Organisations, 2024)

² Whilst the notion of “essential trips” is difficult to define - as is dependent on organisational/contextual specificities -responding to the following questions could provide some guidance as to whether a trip is indeed “essential”: Is the travel time-sensitive and directly linked to humanitarian delivery? Can the objective be achieved remotely (e.g. video call, local staff)? Will *not* travelling negatively impact life-saving activities? Do the benefits of travel outweigh health, cost, and environmental impact?

³ Carbone 4 “Pre-conceived ideas on aviation and climate, November 2022 <https://www.carbone4.com/en/analysis-faq-aviation-climate> “Emissions per passenger in business class are therefore about 3 times higher than in economy class, and up to 6 times higher in first class, with a ratio depending on the amount of space occupied in the cabin.”

- ✓ Measure the movements, costs and maintenance of vehicles and means of transport to gather data about their use. Include maintenance of the vehicles in project budgets.
- ✓ Encourage vehicle sharing and ride-sharing as the principal mode of travel for staff (internally) and between organisations (including within the UN and across INGOs).
- ✓ Promote “eco driving” practices⁴ such as avoid rapid acceleration using gentle braking and minimising idling (where the engine is running whilst the vehicle is stationary)
- ✓ Apply the “Avoid, Shift and Improve” methodology
 - **Avoid** and reduce the need to use motorised transport assets by improving transport management. This includes “right-sizing” vehicles to ensure the most sustainable and environmentally friendly performance of vehicles for the given context. For example, 4x4 vehicles should not be used in urban context with tarmacked roads, as they have emissions comparable to trucks.
 - **Shift** to more environmentally friendly transport modes: public transport, vehicle and ridesharing, walking and cycling
 - **Improve** energy efficiency modes of transport: fuel economy, electric mobility, renewable energy

Transport (freight)

- ✓ Switch from air to sea freight⁵ by improving planning of purchases to allow for goods to be sent in advance and not flown in at the last minute (prepositioning). This presents significant opportunities to reduce emissions and make savings, and also supports preparedness.
- ✓ Choose shipping companies that use sustainable measures (e.g. use of direct routes without transit, use of sustainable fuels).
- ✓ Ensure full loads to optimise transportation.



KEY RESOURCES

Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations

- **Organisation responsible:** DG ECHO
- **Short description:** the guidance refers to fleet and transport in the section on sustainable supply chains (see pages 29-31).
- **Accessibility:** English.

MSF Carbon Travel App

- **Organisation responsible:** Médecins Sans Frontières
- **Short description:** A planning and decision-making travel tool which helps organisations calculate greenhouse gas emissions per trip and compare different options (flight vs train), helping to identify the least emissive point for participants living in different countries to hold their meeting.
- **Accessibility:** English.

Fleet Forum’s Vehicle and ride-sharing toolkit & Fleet Forum’s vehicle-sharing proposal package

⁴ Fleet Forum, E learning- Sustainable Fleet, <https://knowledge.fleetforum.org/knowledge-base/article/e-learning-sustainable-fleet>

⁵ Climate Action Accelerator, Key solutions, [Shift from Air to Sea freight: a key lever to reduce transport emissions](#)

- **Organisation responsible:** Fleet Forum
- **Short description:** Guidance providing tips on how to establish (inter) organisational vehicle and ride-sharing initiatives with the aim to reduce emissions related to professional road travel (tools, examples, strategies to adjust policies and procedures, change management) The package provides guidance for organisations to include ride-sharing and vehicle sharing activities in donor funding requests (proposals and budgets).
- **Accessibility:** English, French.

Environmental Self-Assessment Tool for Fleet and Road Transport

- **Organisation responsible:** Fleet Forum in partnership with Hulo
- **Short description:** Self-assessment tool of environmental performance against several recognised standards and requirements (including DG ECHO's minimum environmental requirements and recommendations), including recommendations for improvement.
- **Accessibility:** English, French, Spanish, Arabic

The Green Mile: How NGOs in Lebanon Are Driving Sustainable Collaboration, March 2025

- **Organisation responsible:** Groupe URD, Fleet Forum and Hulo
- **Short description:** Lessons learned from ridesharing between organisations in Lebanon.
- **Accessibility:** English, French.

Solutions Factsheets on Emissions reduction related to Freight

- **Organisation responsible:** Climate Action Accelerator
- **Short description:** Solutions to reduce freight emissions in humanitarian operations.
- **Accessibility:** English.

Common logistics services: The key to efficient humanitarian aid, 2020

- **Organisation responsible:** Humanity and Inclusion, Atlas Logistique
- **Short description:** Study conducted in the field highlighting the effects of pooled logistics on cost and effectiveness of humanitarian operations
- **Accessibility:** English.

The Environmental Performance of Electric Vehicles vs. Internal Combustion Engine Vehicles, 2022

- **Organisation responsible:** Center for Humanitarian Logistics and Regional Development (CHORD) – a joint venture of Kühne Logistics University (KLU) and Help Logistics
- **Short description:** Study analysing the environmental trade-offs of electric vehicles vs internal combustion engine vehicles in two field operations.
- **Accessibility:** English.



PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Do not assume that electric or hybrid vehicles are always the most effective way to reduce travel and transport emissions, particularly where they would be charged using a high-carbon ("dirty") electricity grid; instead, avoid overlooking the "Avoid, Shift and Improve (A-S-I)" methodology when planning transport interventions.
- Do not treat emissions offsetting (for example, from air travel) as a genuine reduction measure; organisations should avoid delaying or substituting real emission-reduction actions, such as reducing air travel, on the basis that emissions are being offset, especially given the

ongoing research into the social and environmental integrity and long-term sustainability of carbon offsetting projects.⁶

- When considering how to reduce GHG emissions from transport, do not assume that local is automatically more sustainable than international procurement. While local procurement may reduce transport distances, goods may not actually be manufactured locally or under environmentally sustainable conditions. Furthermore, the environmental impacts of transport are often relatively low (provided air freight is avoided)⁷ compared with more significant life-cycle stages such as raw material extraction, production, and end-of-life management.



GOOD PRACTICES

- Ensure successful ridesharing or vehicle-sharing through strong governance, clear communication, security integration, leadership role-modelling, and embedding the practice into organisational culture and budgets.
- Integrate A-S-I methodology into the formal system: policies, SOPs, and the responsibilities assigned to fleet and transport staff.
- Limit your emissions related to international travel by setting up an annual carbon budget for your organisations. This can be done by setting a cap (% of a project total budget) on budget lines for air tickets.
- Strengthen the recruitment of local expertise to reduce the dependency on international air travel by international experts
- Set up a decision-making process which can guide staff (at all levels) before travelling. Examples can include: *Is the travel time-sensitive and directly linked to humanitarian delivery? Can the objective be achieved remotely (e.g. video call, local staff)? Will not travelling negatively impact life-saving activities? Do the benefits of travel outweigh health, cost, and environmental impact?*
- Plan purchases in advance to enable prepositioning of stock in shared regional hubs allow for slower modes of transport (sea and land) thereby minimising the need to resort to air freight. This can bring significant financial and carbon savings and support emergency preparedness.
- Good forecasting and procurement coordination can also help “right-size” procurement and facilitate joint procurement with other organisations.

The INSPIRE+ Consortium is made up of IECAH, ODI, FAIREPROD and Groupe URD. It provides the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) with support in developing its policies via research, training, workshops and the dissemination of findings.

⁶ Carbon Market Watch <https://carbonmarketwatch.org/carbon-credits-and-claims/>

⁷ Conclusions and recommendations regarding LCA use in the humanitarian sector - part of ECHO's mapping of existing LCAs of relief items used in humanitarian aid (see “Life Cycle Assessment : Mapping and Overview of current use by humanitarian organisations” available [here](#) under Downloads)